

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2) 780/05-06

Ref : CB2/H/19

Paper for House Committee meeting on 6 January 2006

Arrangements for House Committee meetings

Purpose

This paper summarises past discussions by Members on arrangements for House Committee (HC) and Finance Committee (FC) meetings.

Previous discussions in 1994-1995

HC meeting on 25 November 1994

2. Concern about HC meetings being delayed because the preceding FC meetings lasted too long was raised at the HC meeting on 25 November 1994. The matter was subsequently discussed at the FC meeting on 28 April 1995.

FC meeting on 28 April 1995

3. At the FC meeting on 28 April 1995, Members noted that several options had been explored, including swapping of the two meetings, i.e. with FC meetings starting at 3:45 pm and the preceding HC meetings starting at 2:15 pm. At that time, the assessment of the implications of this arrangement was that public officers concerned would have to stand by starting from 3:30 pm, until probably, around 5:30 pm or 6:00 pm. The Administration pointed out that such an arrangement might cause difficulties in public officers' attendance as they had planned their meetings and engagements on the basis of FC meetings being held in the earlier part of Friday afternoons.

4. Another option which had been considered was to hold FC and HC meetings on separate sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, or holding one of the meetings on Thursday afternoons. The option was not recommended because the majority of Members favoured holding the two meetings on the same Friday afternoon, according to a survey conducted among Members in 1993.

5. FC decided that future meetings should start at 2:30 pm and end at 4:30 pm sharp. A new rule was added to the House Rules (rule 20(e) of the current House Rules) to the effect that if an FC meeting was scheduled to be held in the same afternoon, the HC meeting would start at 4:30 pm.

Previous discussions in 2001-2002

HC meeting on 8 March 2002

6. At the HC meeting on 8 March 2002, the matter of whether holding HC meetings immediately after FC meetings should be changed was again raised. The matter was subsequently discussed at the HC meeting on 22 March 2002.

HC meeting on 22 March 2002

7. Most of the Members who expressed views at the meeting did not support holding FC meetings immediately after HC meetings. The main views put forward were that government business should take priority over in-house matters, and that public officers attending FC meetings might have to wait for a long time because the ending time of HC meetings was uncertain.

8. A few Members, however, expressed concern that the finishing time of 4:30 pm of FC meetings had not been strictly observed. There was also the view that holding FC meetings after HC meetings would ensure that there would be sufficient time for discussion of all FC items on the agenda.

9. The meeting decided that no change should be made to the arrangements for FC and FC meetings, and the finishing time of 4:30 pm for FC meetings should be strictly observed. The meeting also agreed that the Administration should be requested to better plan the agenda for FC meetings.

10. The Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) was informed of Members' decision at his meeting with the HC Chairman on 25 March 2002. CS undertook to remind the then Finance Bureau to arrange for the more important and urgent items to be placed on the early part of the agenda for FC meetings.

11. The relevant extract from the minutes of the HC meeting on 22 March 2002 is in Appendix I.

Statistics on duration of FC and HC meetings held since 2004-2005

12. Statistics on the duration of FC and HC meetings held since October 2004 are provided in Appendices II and III respectively. The following table gives a summary of the findings –

	Duration	Number of meetings
FC	30 minutes or less	1
	31 minutes to 60 minutes	2
	61 minutes to 90 minutes	3
	91 minutes to 120 minutes	6
	more than 120 minutes	1 ^{Note 1}
	Total	13 ^{Note 2}
HC	30 minutes or less	23
	31 minutes to 60 minutes	11
	61 minutes to 90 minutes	6
	91 minutes to 120 minutes	3
	more than 120 minutes	1 ^{Note 3}
	Total	44

Note 1 The duration of the FC meeting held on 24 June 2005 was 125 minutes.

Note 2 The FC meeting on 8 July 2005 was excluded because it was held after the HC meeting on that day.

Note 3 The duration of the HC meeting held on 15 October 2004 was 155 minutes.

Advice sought

13. Members are invited to note the past discussions by Members on the arrangements for meetings of HC and FC.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 January 2006

Extract from the minutes of House Committee Meeting on 22 March 2002

X X X X X X X X X

X. Arrangements for House Committee meetings

(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1373/01-02)

62. The Chairman said that at the last HC meeting, Mr James TIEN had raised the concern about HC meetings being delayed because Finance Committee (FC) meetings could not finish at 4:30 pm. The Chairman said that the Secretariat had provided a paper proposing four possible options regarding the arrangements for FC and HC meetings.

63. Dr YEUNG Sum said that Members belonging to the Democratic Party proposed that no change be made to the existing arrangements for meetings of FC and HC. He pointed out that according to the statistics in Appendix III, the average duration of FC meetings in the 2000-01 and 2001-02 sessions was within two hours. He considered that FC meetings could finish at 4:30 pm sharp if members' questions were more concise. Dr YEUNG further said that HC meetings sometimes lasted more than one hour, and the meetings could be even longer if controversial subject matters were discussed.

64. Dr Philip WONG said that as Chairman of FC, he welcomed any suggestion that would enable more effective use of meeting time. He explained, however, that sometimes it was difficult to cut short the discussion of an item, as some members wanted to know more about the financial proposal and they were not members of the relevant Panel(s). He considered that FC meetings could be shorter if members' questions were more concise and to the point.

65. Assistant Secretary General 1 (ASG1) said that it had always been the practice for FC meetings to be held before the HC meeting, if both meetings were scheduled for the same Friday afternoon. In 1995, to address some Members' concern about the delay caused to HC meetings when FC meetings ran beyond 4:30 pm, the meeting arrangement was reviewed by FC and the suggestion of swapping the meetings time of FC and HC was examined. At that time, HC meetings were relatively longer. The uncertainty of the ending time would make it difficult for the public officers attending FC meetings to plan their engagements for that afternoon. FC therefore decided on 28 April 1995 that its meetings should continue to start at 2:30 pm but should end at 4:30 pm sharp.

66. ASG1 further said that in the current session, there were only two occasions where FC meetings could not finish at 4:30 pm. On both occasions, the Administration advised that the items that had not been dealt with before 4:30 pm were time critical and could not be deferred to a later meeting. It was on this basis that the meetings had to run beyond 4:30 pm. To ensure that FC meetings could finish before 4:30 pm, the Chairman of FC had agreed that the Administration should be reminded of the need to place time-critical items on the earlier part of the agenda.

67. Mr Henry WU expressed support that the existing arrangement should not be changed. He pointed out that according to the statistics in Appendices III and IV of the paper, six FC meetings held in the 2000-01 session lasted one hour, whereas seven HC meetings lasted longer than two hours. He agreed with Dr Philip WONG that efforts should be made to ensure that FC meetings could finish at 4:30 pm.

68. Mr James TIEN pointed out that although FC had decided in April 1995 that its meetings should end at 4:30 pm sharp, this finishing time had not been strictly observed. He noted that because of the pressure for FC to finish its meeting at 4:30 pm, there was often insufficient time for members to ask questions on the last one or two items on the agenda. Mr TIEN said that he would only accept that the present arrangement be maintained if FC meetings would end at 4:30 pm sharp, and any unfinished business be deferred to future meetings.

69. Mr James TIEN further said that Members could also consider the option of holding HC meetings before FC meetings, i.e. HC meetings to start at 2:30 pm and finish at, say, 3:45 pm. He suggested that public officers attending FC meeting could be advised to arrive around 3:45 pm. He pointed out that under the present arrangement, public officers attending FC meetings would still have to wait for their turn to present their papers and answer Members' questions. He was of the view that swapping the FC and HC meetings would ensure that there would be sufficient time for discussion of all FC items on the agenda, as the FC meeting would not be under pressure to end at 4:30 pm and could last as long as Members considered necessary.

70. Mr Andrew WONG said that he was the Chairman of FC when the matter was discussed in April 1995. He was of the view that unless HC meetings could end before a finishing time of, say, 3:45 pm, public officers attending FC meetings would have to wait for a long time, and urgent government business which required the decision of FC might be delayed. He pointed out that it was the duty of LegCo Members to examine government proposals, and this should take priority over HC meetings, which mainly dealt with preparatory work for Council meetings

and other in-house business.

71. Mr Andrew WONG further said that FC had made the right decision in April 1995 that its meetings should be held before HC meetings. He considered that only some fine-tuning to the present arrangement was necessary. Mr WONG suggested that to enable more effective use of the time of FC meetings, Members should make their best efforts to join more Panels and the two subcommittees under FC, so that questions about the policy aspects of the financial proposals could be raised and answered before discussion at the relevant FC meetings.

72. Miss Margaret NG said that FC meetings should be held before HC meetings, as government business should take priority over in-house matters. Miss NG further said that she supported in principle that FC meetings should end at 4:30 pm sharp, and any unfinished business should be dealt with at future meetings. However, she considered that the FC agenda should not include too many items for a two-hour meeting, and the Administration should not place the more important and urgent items on the latter part of the agenda. She pointed out that scrutiny of financial proposals was one of the important powers of LegCo, and Members should be allowed sufficient time to raise questions on these proposals. She suggested that if necessary, additional FC meetings should be scheduled to continue discussion of any unfinished business.

73. Mr IP Kwok-him said that he had no problem with the existing arrangement, except that sometimes an FC meeting might overrun and delay the HC meeting scheduled to be held after the FC meeting. He further said that if Members were to consider swapping the meeting time of FC and HC, a finishing time should be set for the HC meeting in order not to delay the FC meeting. He added that he would accept the swapping of the two meetings only on the condition that a finishing time of, say, 3:30 pm, was set for HC meetings.

74. The Chairman said that the crux of the problem was that the finishing time of 4:30 pm for FC meetings was not strictly observed. She said that if Members agreed that FC meetings should strictly observe the finishing time, a clear message should be sent to the Administration that FC meetings must end at 4:30 pm sharp, and any unfinished business would be dealt with at another meeting.

75. Mr Andrew WONG said that although a member could, under the FC Procedure, move without notice that discussion on an item or further proceedings of the committee be adjourned, it would be for the members present to take a vote to decide whether the meeting should be adjourned. He further said that even with better planning of the agenda, it was still possible that FC meetings might overrun when there was heated

discussion on controversial items. He was not in favour of making it a rule for FC to adjourn its meetings at 4:30 pm sharp, as there would be occasions where discussion had to continue beyond 4:30 pm when an urgent item was involved.

76. Miss Margaret NG said that should a member move without notice that the proceedings of the meeting be adjourned, the Chairman of FC should deal with this motion in accordance with the FC Procedure. If this happened frequently and posed a problem to the smooth conduct of FC and HC meetings, the existing arrangement should be reviewed again.

77. Mr Henry WU, Mr Albert HO and Ms Emily LAU considered that there should be some flexibility for an FC meeting to continue for five or ten more minutes after 4:30 pm in order to conclude the discussion on a particular item. The Chairman advised that committees should make their best endeavours to finish their meetings within the two-hour time slot. Although the chairman concerned could allow the discussion to continue for a few more minutes, it would not be appropriate to start discussing a new item towards the end of the meeting. She added that to ensure effective use of meeting time, Members should bear in mind the need to be concise and to the point in asking questions. Mr IP Kwok-him, Dr YEUNG Sum and Mr James TIEN concurred with the Chairman.

78. The Chairman concluded that most Members were of the view that no change be made to the existing arrangements for FC and HC meetings, and the finishing time of 4:30 pm for FC meetings should be strictly observed. The Chairman suggested that the Chairman of FC should convey Members' views to the Administration and request it to better plan the agenda for FC meetings. Members agreed.

X X X X X X X X X

Appendix II

Finance Committee meetings held during the 2004-2005 session

<u>Date</u>	<u>Starting time</u>	<u>Finishing time</u>	<u>Time taken</u>	<u>Items on the agenda</u> [() denotes items deferred]
19.11.04	2:30 pm	4:15 pm	1 hr 45 mins	2
17.12.04	2:30 pm	3:20 pm	50 mins	4
14.1.05	2:30 pm	2:45 pm	15 mins	4
25.2.05	2:30 pm	4:30 pm	2 hrs	4 (2)
4.3.05	2:30 pm	4:20 pm	1 hr 50 mins	6
18.3.05	2:30 pm	3:40 pm	1 hr 10 mins	1
6.5.05	2:30 pm	4:30 pm	2 hrs	7
27.5.05	2:30 pm	3:35 pm	1 hr 5 mins	4
10.6.05	2:30 pm	4:00 pm	1 hr 30 mins	6
24.6.05	2:30 pm	4:35 pm	2 hrs 5 mins	7
8.7.05*	3:15 pm	7:00 pm	3 hrs 45 mins	5

* The meeting was held after the House Committee meeting on that day.

Total number of meetings : **11**

Finance Committee meetings held during the 2005-2006 session
(up to 16 December 2005)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Starting time</u>	<u>Finishing time</u>	<u>Time taken</u>	<u>Items on the agenda</u>
18.11.05	2:30 pm	4:00 pm	1 hr 30 mins	3
2.12.05	2:30 pm	3:20 pm	50 mins	1
16.12.05	2:30 pm	4:30 pm	2 hrs	3

Total number of meetings : **3**

Summary of findings

Duration	Number of meetings
30 minutes or less	1
31 minutes to 60 minutes	2
61 minutes to 90 minutes	3
91 minutes to 120 minutes	6
more than 120 minutes	1 ^{Note 1}
Total	13 ^{Note 2}

Note 1 The duration of the FC meeting held on 24 June 2005 was 125 minutes.

Note 2 The FC meeting on 8 July 2005 was excluded because it was held after the HC meeting on that day.

House Committee meetings held during the 2004-2005 session

<u>Date</u>	<u>Starting time</u>	<u>Finishing time</u>	<u>Time taken</u>
6.10.04	3:45 pm	3:48 pm	3 mins
8.10.04	2:30 pm	2:50 pm	20 mins
15.10.04	2:30 pm	5:05 pm	2 hrs 35 mins
29.10.04	2:30 pm	4:00 pm	1 hr 30 mins
5.11.04	2:30 pm	2:58 pm	28 mins
12.11.04	2:30 pm	3:00 pm	30 mins
19.11.04	4:15 pm	4:35 pm	20 mins
26.11.04	2:30 pm	3:57 pm	1 hr 27 mins
3.12.04	2:31 pm	2:34 pm	3 mins
10.12.04	2:31 pm	3:16 pm	45 mins
17.12.04	3:29 pm	4:08 pm	39 mins
7.1.05	2:30 pm	2:50 pm	20 mins
14.1.05	2:45 pm	3:19 pm	34 mins
21.1.05	2:30 pm	3:32 pm	1 hr 2 mins
4.2.05	2:30 pm	2:40 pm	10 mins
18.2.05	4:05 pm	4:58 pm	53 mins
25.2.05	4:35 pm	4:44 pm	9 mins
4.3.05	4:23 pm	4:29 pm	6 mins
11.3.05	2:30 pm	4:07 pm	1 hr 37 mins
18.3.05	3:43 pm	3:48 pm	5 mins

<u>Date</u>	<u>Starting time</u>	<u>Finishing time</u>	<u>Time taken</u>
1.4.05	2:30 pm	2:51 pm	21 mins
8.4.05	2:30 pm	4:00 pm	1 hr 30 mins
15.4.05	2:30 pm	3:06 pm	36 mins
22.4.05	2:30 pm	3:05 pm	35 mins
29.4.05	2:30 pm	3:04 pm	34 mins
6.5.05	4:36 pm	4:54 pm	18 mins
13.5.05	2:30 pm	3:50 pm	1 hr 20 mins
20.5.05	2:30 pm	3:38 pm	1 hr 8 mins
27.5.05	3:35 pm	3:45 pm	10 mins
3.6.05	2:30 pm	2:44 pm	14 mins
10.6.05	4:03 pm	4:12 pm	9 mins
17.6.05	2:30 pm	3:56 pm	1 hr 26 mins
24.6.05	4:40 pm	4:57 pm	17 mins
8.7.05	2:30 pm	3:10 pm	40 mins
7.10.05	4:20 pm	4:40 pm	20 mins

Total number of meetings : **35**

House Committee meetings held during the 2005-2006 session
(up to 16 December 2005)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Starting time</u>	<u>Finishing time</u>	<u>Time taken</u>
14.10.05	2:30 pm	3:04 pm	34 mins
21.10.05	2:30 pm	3:52 pm	1 hr 22 mins
4.11.05	2:30 pm	2:44 pm	14 mins
11.11.05	2:30 pm	2:43 pm	13 mins
18.11.05	4:05 pm	4:25 pm	20 mins
25.11.05	2:30 pm	2:35 pm	5 mins
2.12.05	3:25 pm	3:35 pm	10 mins
9.12.05	2:30 pm	3:15 pm	45 mins
16.12.05	4:30 pm	4:50 pm	20 mins

Total number of meetings : **9**

Summary of findings

Duration	Number of meetings
30 minutes or less	23
31 minutes to 60 minutes	11
61 minutes to 90 minutes	6
91 minutes to 120 minutes	3
more than 120 minutes	1 ^{Note 1}
Total	44

Note 1 The duration of the HC meeting held on 15 October 2004 was 155 minutes.